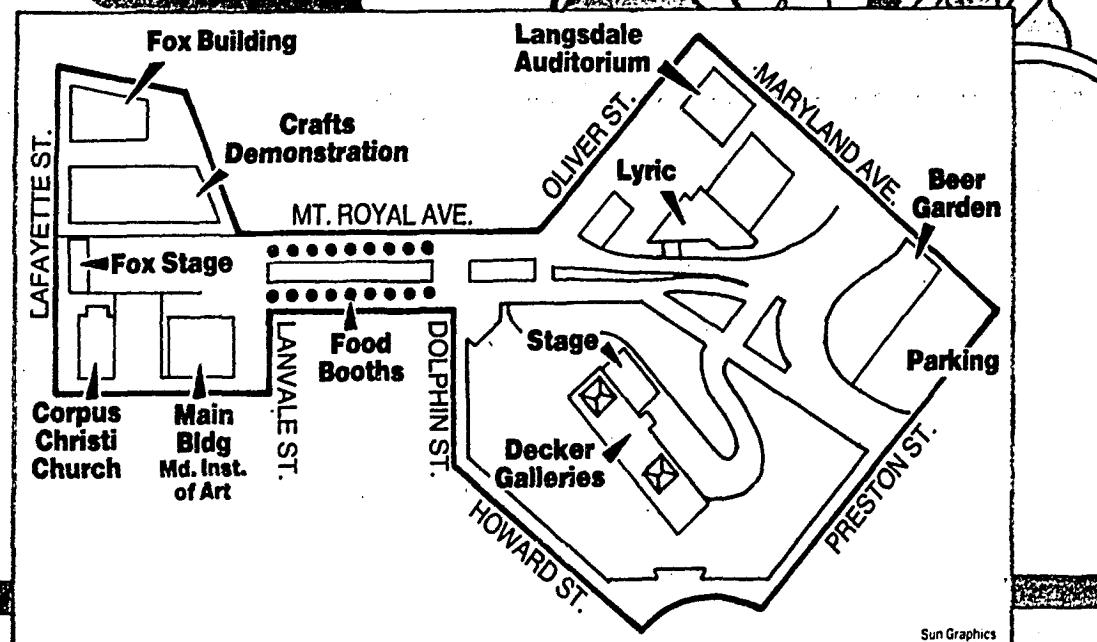
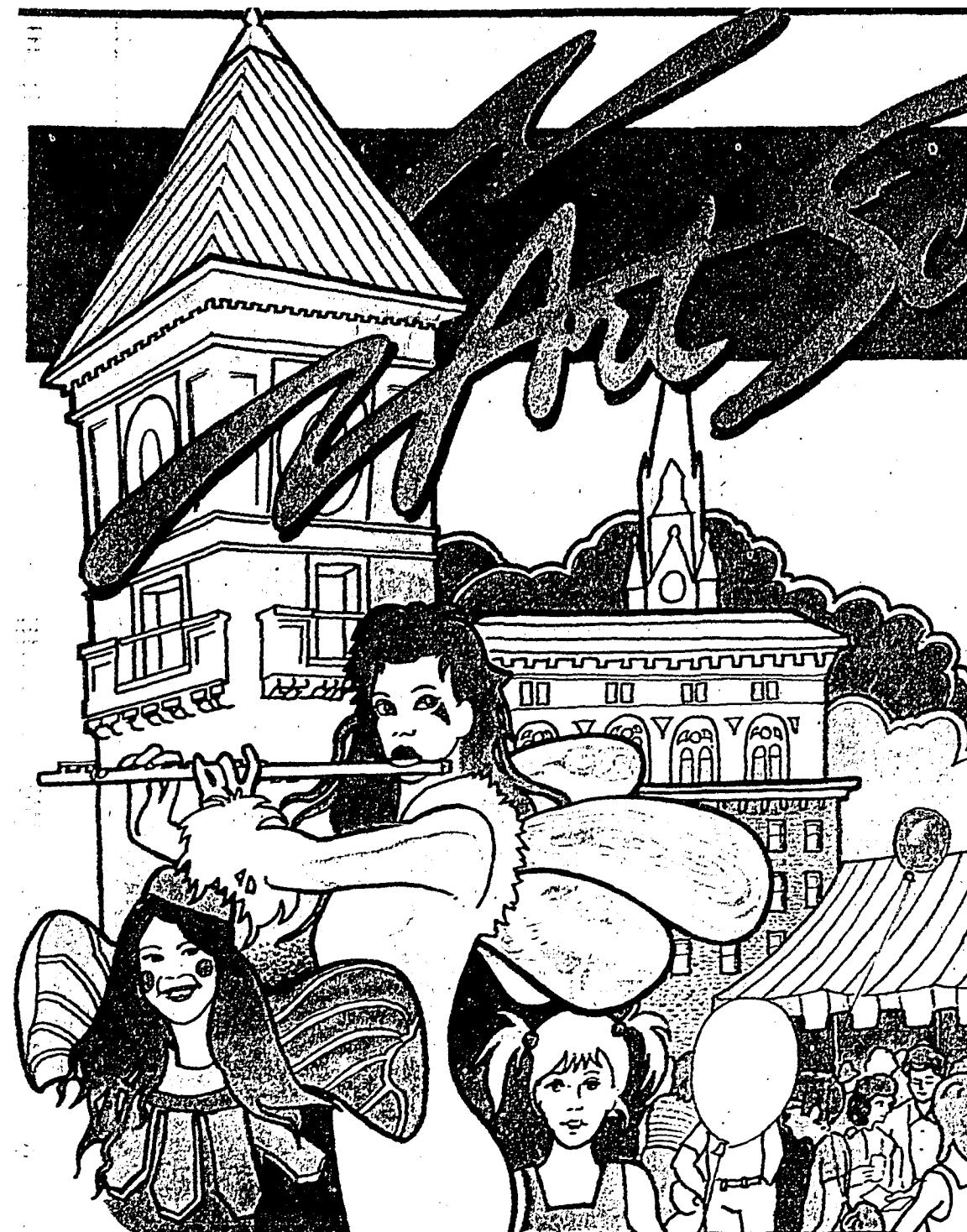


Art Scape: Three-day festival celebrates the arts

Scarupa, Henry

The Sun (1837-1995); Jul 17, 1983; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun pg. D1



Three-day festival celebrates the arts

By Henry Scarupa

ARTSCAPE '83 is probably the grandest celebration of the arts the city will see this year.

Next weekend's free outdoor party in the Mount Royal corridor will showcase a multitude of visual and performing artists, most of whom are from this area. More than 100 painters, sculptors and photographers will be represented along with nearly half that number of performers.

Visual arts exhibits will feature the latest in paintings, sculptures and assemblages together with a dash of performance art. The crafts section will present 35 craftspeople, judged among the best in the field, working in clay, glass, wood, fiber and metal.

Performance events, running almost continuously, will include jazz, gospel, bluegrass, big band and classical groups, along with presentations of dance, theater, poetry readings and film. Included are such names as Taj Mahal and the Baltimore Symphony, Abdu-Raschid Yahya and the Baltimore Ballet Company. Children will be feted with a parade all their own and a marionette show.

Like any self-respecting midway, Art Scape will have a variety of food vendors — but with a difference. These will be Charles street restaurateurs. And instead of dishing out the usual carnival fare, they will be serving such trendy staples as lemon chicken, pasta salad, avocado sandwiches with dill sauce, buttered croissants, meat samosas, yogurt with mangoes and apple cider, to list a partial menu.

Marking its second year, the three-day Art Scape festival is produced by the City of Baltimore with the aim of bridging the gap between the arts community and the public, by providing artists with an expanded forum. Private and corporate sectors contributed two-thirds of the festival's \$190,000 budget.

"Art Scape is a very positive event for the city," says Dr. Leslie King Hammond, dean

of graduate studies at the Maryland Institute, College of Art, and one of the organizers of visual arts for the fair. "It gives professionals a chance to show off and people in the community a chance to sample their work and become aware of the serious commitment to art in the city. There's a lot of creative energy being expended here, but I'm not sure everyone realizes the caliber of work that's being done.

"Artists want people to cross over to their side of town to see what they're doing. And the community is constantly fascinated with what goes on in the creative process and the end result. Last year, I noticed that people, even if they didn't quite understand what they saw, were happy to be there. Who doesn't love a festival?"

Possibly destined to be the most unusual and controversial show in Art Scape '83 is "Reconstructed Elements" — mixed-media works by 14 artists who have broken with the traditional approach to art — being held at the Lyric Opera House.

"Some of the pieces are assembled and constructed from materials which traditionally are not thought of as art materials," explains Dr. Hammond, who served as curator of the Lyric show.

"There'll be a lot of glass and tubing and paper bags and vinyl and asphalt and concrete — all the things we use and take for granted in everyday life. One artist even uses sod, fresh grass, to construct his work, what we call 'living pieces,' pieces that have a life energy to them and a definite life expectancy. They'll be seen in the Lyric and then never seen again."

"The materials are familiar to everyone. The only problem the viewer may have is understanding the symbolism."

Aissatou Mijiza and Littleton Alston are two of the artists taking part in Reconstructed Elements. With the deadline for installing their work only days away, both are hurrying to complete their projects.

Ms. Mejiza pauses at her third-floor walk-up to gesture toward a mummy-like object propped up against the wall. Wrapped in white gauze and covered with pink netting, it was created for another installation she called "Apparition of Psyche."

It was entirely constructed of plaster bandages, the kind doctors use to form casts around broken limbs. She had the moistened strips placed over parts of her body and then, as they hardened, removed. She pieced together the various sections, forming a rigid, hollow figure very much like a child's doll.

Perhaps because the figure was modeled directly from her own likeness, she has been unable to put it aside. With an uncanny willfulness for an inanimate object, it has kept reappearing in succeeding works. It will be the focus of her Artscape installation.

To exorcise its influence, Ms. Mejiza is building a sister piece for the show and will endow it with a ceramic mask. The old mummy will repose in a black box at the Lyric. After the show the artist hopes to slam the cover shut and retire the old mummy for good.

Ms. Mejiza arrived at mixed me-

dia through a background in painting. She left her home in Philadelphia five years ago to do graduate work at the Maryland Institute's Hoffberger School, and ventured into mixed media construction almost from the start. Along with the urge to experiment was the element of necessity.

"Paints and canvases were terribly expensive," she says, "and so I decided to assemble pieces."

It cost nothing to rummage through trash bins for usable objects. Of late Ms. Mejiza has tired of scavenging, preferring to rely on friends and relatives for discarded items.

Although she paints occasionally, she has done mostly site works for the past year and a half. Trained also in music and dance and now hosting the Saturday evening cultural affairs program, "Creative Forces," on WEAA-FM radio, Ms. Mejiza finds herself increasingly drawn to performance.

"I feel the mixed media format and the performance format allow me to embrace a lot more disciplines," she explains. "I think art is becoming holistic again. The divisions between disciplines are breaking down."

Littleton Alston, a recent MFA from the Rinehart School of Sculpt-

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—Dr. Leslie King Hammond

ture, runs his hand over the head of a sleek greyhound at his studio at the school. The dog, which is almost twice life size, is intended for "Reconstructed Elements."

Mr. Alston spent several days carefully scrutinizing a friend's two greyhounds before modeling the figure realistically in clay. From the clay image he made molds for casting the dog in fiber glass. Up to that point the procedure was straightforward enough.

He deviated from the usual in covering the beast with hundreds of adhesive bandages, giving it a glistening plastic skin in a neutral tan. In the completed installation the dog will rest in a large wooden cage which Mr. Alston is still building.

He plans to add other components to the piece, perhaps the caged umbrella he completed earlier or the stepladder he laboriously wrapped in metal tape. He even brushed off a wooden chair for himself to add a performance element, but then changed his mind. Not one to brood over his art, Mr. Alston allows himself to be moved by the inspiration of the moment.

"I come in here and let things happen," he elaborates. "If I use sketches then I'm following a floor plan. I'd rather have the liberty of changing course at any time in the process.

"I'm not knocking traditional ways of art because occasionally I use them myself. But this way I can en-

tertain many more possibilities, things like light, sound, motion, human interaction, public involvement. I like having the freedom to do what I want to do, without confining my art to a pedestal."

The show's name, Reconstructed Elements, sums up the new ways of thinking, feeling, seeing and presenting art, according to Dr. Hammond.

"As we move toward the Twenty-First Century," she says, "artists face an onslaught of technology — new materials and new techniques along with new ways of living and thinking. And these are colliding and merging with traditional forms."

"I think we're moving back towards art as an integral part of our experience. Many artists now are performing with their pieces because they no longer see their work as isolated extensions of their presence. They want more active participation from the viewer, the audience and the community."

If Artscape's visual arts are on the cutting edge of the new, the performing arts pretty much hark back to the traditional and the familiar. Still, this doesn't prevent creative artists from finding new ways of doing old things.

Noteworthy in this respect is "African Gifts," scheduled for Sunday

evening, which brings together the city's four black dance companies in a single composition. Two of the companies perform traditional African dance, while two specialize in modern dance influenced by African forms.

"All four groups will be on stage at the same time," says Eva Anderson, director of the Baltimore Dance Theater and coordinator of the effort. "They will be performing together and performing separately. It is one long work made up of different segments."

Whatever the art form, artists will benefit from the exposure and from lowering of barriers between themselves and the public.

"Art is a very lonely and demanding profession," Dr. Hammond goes on. "And if nothing else, artists look for moral and spiritual support from others to reaffirm what they're doing. The number of people who are going to visit Artscape [last year the figure was estimated at 250,000] will far exceed what an individual artist could draw to shows in private galleries.

"And in turn Artscape should help the public understand that what is being created in Baltimore is good, is important, has substance, has meaning and can make a contribution to the community."